

(2) I believe that there is a definite relation between the new-grass feeding and the shedding of sambar horns. I have noticed that when the March-April-May thunder storms ('Mango showers') are late, sambar remain in hard horn later.

HONNAMETTI ESTATE,
ATTIKAN P.O.,
VIA MYSORE (S.I.).
May 23, 1948.

R. C. MORRIS,
Colonel.

10.—WILD DEER IN MAURITIUS

In the *Journal* of our Society, Vol. vii, pp. 440 to 446, is an account contributed by Rear Admiral W. R. Kennedy of a visit in the year 1892 to the islands of Rodriguez, Mauritius and Reunion. With it is a lithographed drawing of the head of a Rodriguez stag, shot by the Admiral, having horns of 34 in. in length with upper tines and brow antlers of 14 in. The gralloched weight was 229 lbs.

At that time the herds of deer roamed in the old forests of Rodriguez unmolested except by naval officers during their rare visits to the island. The deer were introduced, the Admiral related, some thirty years previously when a pair were landed from Borneo and subsequently another pair from Mauritius. 'These have done well, and at the present day (1892) possibly from 1,500 to 2,000 deer exist on the island, some of the stags being as much as 20 stone in weight and carrying fine heads.' That was a good stock of deer for an area only ten miles long by four broad. The climate is similar to that of Mauritius, and the highest peak on the island is 1,300 feet.

Regarding Mauritius the Admiral remarked, 'During our stay several of the wealthy proprietors organized *châsses* in our honour, on which occasions many deer were killed . . .'

With reference to the above it is pleasing to read in the comprehensive present day account contributed to the 'Field' of 31st May 1941 by P.H.G., 'It is estimated that there are at present some 20,000 to 25,000 head of deer on the island (Mauritius). *La Châsse* accounts normally for about 2,000 every season. . . . A full grown stag weighs about 20 stone, . . . The head is remarkable for the beautiful grain of horn and the long, sharp tines of ivory whiteness.'

'These deer', writes P.H.G., 'are *Cervus rusa* the species being said to have been originally introduced by the Dutch, who were the original colonists, from Java in 1639.' Admiral Kennedy believed the Mauritius deer to be identical with the Sambar, having been introduced from Ceylon. 'It will be noticed', says P.H.G., 'by readers of Mr. Rowland Ward's standard work "Records of Big Game", that the parent stock of *Cervus rusa* in Java exhibit greater length, while their acclimatized descendants in Mauritius excel in span.' A notable head exhibited at the present time in the Port-Louis Museum has outside curve of 34½" with remarkable tip to tip span of 33" which is possibly a world record for this variety of deer. A photograph of this head is given.

P.H.G. gives the dimensions of good present day heads as averaging 28 to 35 inches outside curve with tip to tip span of 18 to 26 inches, so it is evident the stock has not deteriorated in horn growth or in number of the animals on the island of Mauritius.

In his monograph 'The Larger Deer of British India', part iii, published in Society's *Journal*, Vol. xlv, pp. 27 et seq., R. I. Pocock gives the type of the Genus *Rusa* H. Smith to be *Cervus unicolor* the distribution of which is from Ceylon and India eastwards to the Philippines and beyond, and admits three species of Sambar.

1. *Rusa unicolor unicolor* Kerr.

Locality of the type Ceylon, as restricted by Hamilton Smith. Distribution:—Ceylon.

2. *Rusa unicolor nigra* Blainville.

Locality of the type not stated but probably somewhere in north India. Distribution:—India apart from the western desert and semi-desert areas, but not perhaps crossing the Brahmaputra in the north-east, the Assamese Sambar belonging apparently to the next race.

Distinguished from the Ceylonese race by its potentially larger antlers and apparently larger skull.

3. *Rusa unicolor equina* Cuvier.

Locality of the type Sumatra. Distribution:—from Sumatra, through Malaya to Burma and Assam, Siam, Cambodia, Cochin, China, Annam, Yunnan, Szechwan, Hainan.

Distinguished from the Ceylonese and Indian races by the terminal tines of the antlers being much less variable in their respective lengths, the front-outer always definitely continuing the line of the beam and being longer and thicker than the back-inner which projects inwards, backwards and upwards from its inner side; the antlers also are much shorter on the average than in the Indian race, with the brow tine longer compared with the beam, and there is some evidence that the skulls are a little shorter on the average.

It is certain therefore that the Sambar of Mauritius are descended from either 1 or 3 of the sub-species described by Pocock; and from which of the two could only be decided by expert examination of a series of skulls and horns.

BANGALORE,
December 20, 1947.

R. W. BURTON,
Lt.-Col., Indian Army (Retd.).

[Mr. W. W. A. Phillips, author of 'Manual of the Mammals of Ceylon' comments on the above as follows:

'Colonel Burton's note, on the occurrence of Wild Deer in Mauritius is of considerable historical and general interest. To learn that the descendants of the Sambar, liberated on Mauritius, are still so plentiful, is most pleasing in these days of the rapid

decrease and extermination of wild life, all over the world and especially in the East.

Until a series of specimens of the Mauritius Deer has been submitted to the British Natural History Museum authorities, for critical examination, an element of doubt must remain as to which race of the Sambar they are referable. Personally I am inclined to the belief that they will be found to belong to the typical race *unicolor* from Ceylon. The description of the three-tined antlers of the Mauritius Stag, approximates closely to that of the typical head of the Ceylonese race, with the exception that the average stag in Mauritius would seem to have developed a slightly longer main beam. The record antlers of the Ceylon Sambar stag (*Rusa unicolor unicolor*) measure $33\frac{7}{8}$ inches with a spread of $21\frac{3}{4}$ inches and any head measuring over 30 inches is considered an exceptionally good one for the typical race. Colonel Burton states that 'P.H.G.' gives the dimensions of good present-day heads in Mauritius, as averaging 28 to 35 inches, outside curve, with a tip to tip span of 18 to 26 inches.

The possibility that the Dutch liberated sambar from both Java (or Borneo) and Ceylon, cannot be overlooked—the present day Mauritius Sambar may be of mixed descent. This is quite likely as during, the Dutch occupation, ships from both Ceylon and Dutch East India must have been continually calling at Mauritius and, as the young sambar is easily tamed and does well in captivity, there would be little more difficulty in bringing sambar to the Island, than domestic animals.

The Dutch appear to have been much interested in the experimental introduction of certain wild animals into their possessions. Not only have we this instance of the introduction of sambar into Mauritius and the neighbouring islands, but they are believed to have been responsible for the introduction of the Hog-deer (*Hyelaphus porcinus*) into Ceylon, during their occupation. The Ceylonese race of the Hog-deer has now been separated by Pocock, under the subspecific name *orysus* (see 'The Larger Deer of British India', part iv, *Journal, Bombay Natural History Society*, Vol. xlv, p. 177). Unfortunately, unlike the Mauritius sambar, the Ceylon Hog-deer is a fast dying race, having been brought to the verge of extinction through night shooting, in season and out.

Rear-Admiral W. R. Kennedy, who contributed the original account of the sambar in Mauritius, was evidently, like so many naval officers, a keen sportsman. It was he who was one of the prime movers in the formation of the Ceylon Game Protection Society, which still continues as the Ceylon Game and Fauna Protection Society. Rear-Admiral Kennedy, who was then commanding the East India Squadron, took the chair at the inauguration meeting, held in Colombo on the 28th May, 1894.—Eds.]

11.—STRANDING OF A WHALE (*MEGAPTERA NODOSA*) ON THE TRAVANCORE COAST IN 1943.

I was surprised to find that there is no reference to the stranding of a specimen of *Megaptera* on the Anjengo Coast near Quilon